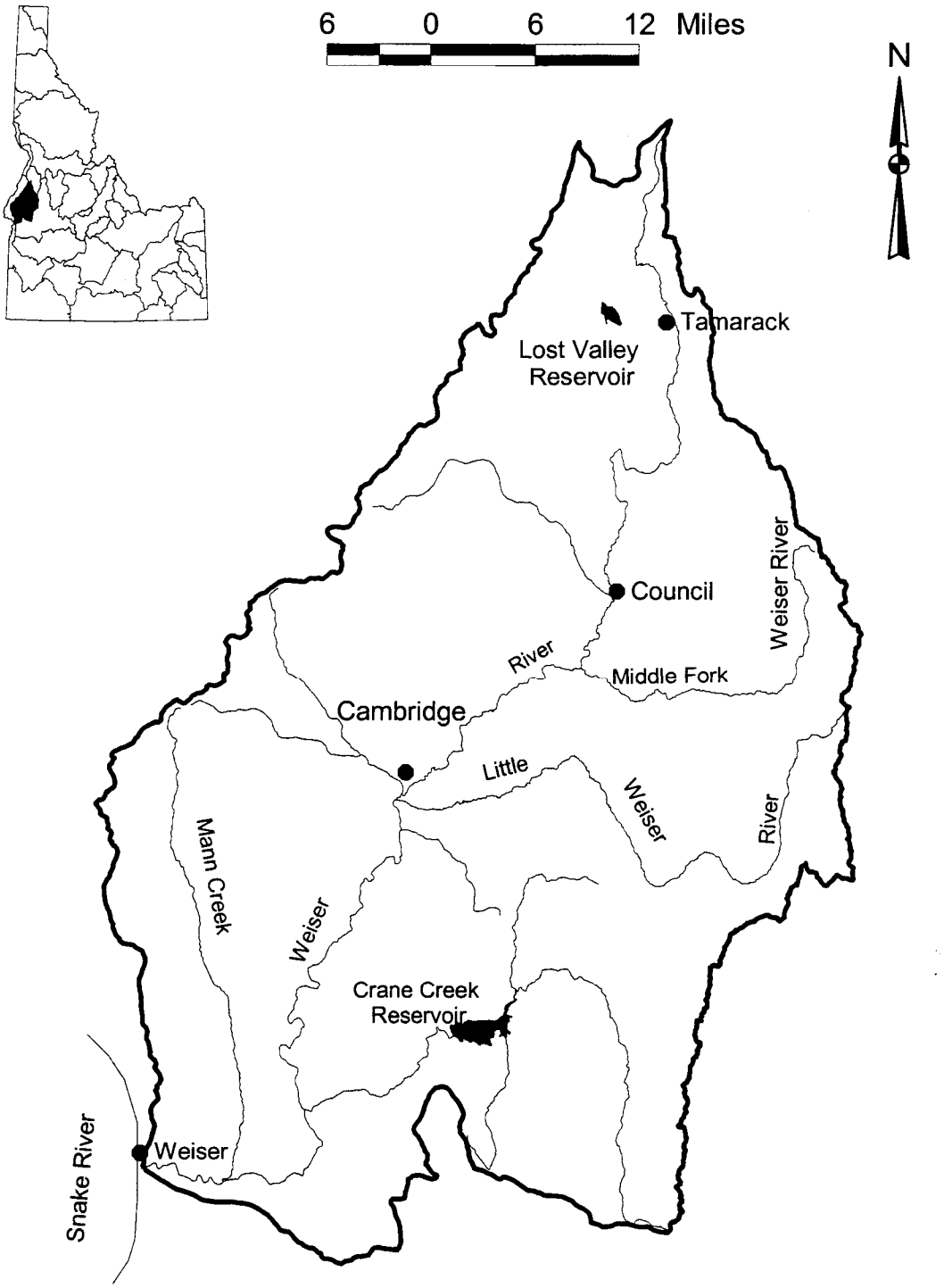
Weiser River Drainage



18. WEISER RIVER DRAINAGE

A. Overview

The Weiser River Basin lies in southwestern Idaho. It drains from the Seven Devils Mountains on the north, Cuddy Mountain to the west, and the West Mountains to the east. The drainage flows in a southwesterly direction for about 112 miles where it drains into the Snake River near the City of Weiser. Elevations in the drainage vary from 8,000 feet in the mountains to 2,090 feet at Weiser. The Weiser River drains a basin area of 1,660 square miles, primarily in low, rolling foothills dissected by many small streams. It has an average annual runoff of 742,000 acre-feet of water. Most of the runoff comes during the spring, with extremely low flows during the remainder of the year.

The Weiser River has no mainstem storage reservoirs. Private irrigation districts have constructed four reservoirs on tributary streams. Those reservoirs, Lost Valley, Ben Ross, Crane Creek, and Manns Creek, have a total storage capacity of about 83,000 acre-feet of water. All were constructed to provide irrigation benefits, and typically fill during the spring runoff period and become extremely low in the late summer and early fall. In extremely dry years, Crane Creek, Ben Ross, and Lost Valley have gone dry. Manns Creek, Ben Ross, and Crane Creek reservoirs are best suited for production of warmwater game species. Manns Creek Reservoir supports a mixed fishery of warmwater species and rainbow trout. All three reservoirs support populations of largemouth bass and crappie. Crane Creek Reservoir is currently impacted by a large population of common carp limiting the fishery. Ben Ross Reservoir is managed for quality fishing for largemouth bass. It also has bluegill and black crappie that provide prey for the bass and a general fishing opportunity.

Lost Valley Reservoir can be an excellent rainbow trout fishery but has a history of problems associated with stunted yellow perch. It has routinely been chemically reclaimed when the perch population increases to the point it reduces growth of both the trout and perch. A proposal to enlarge the dam and triple the storage capacity of Lost Valley Reservoir has been evaluated for its benefits to irrigators, the reservoir fishery and for providing late summer flows to the Weiser River. Unfortunately, the proposal would result in negative impacts to an important colony of Northern Idaho Ground Squirrels so the project has not been completed.

From the mouth of the Weiser River upstream to Galloway Dam, the river supports a marginal warmwater fishery. Low summer flows and poor water quality limit fishery production in this section of river. From Galloway Dam upstream to Cambridge, the river supports a limited fishery of rainbow trout and smallmouth bass. Upstream from Cambridge, rainbow trout and mountain whitefish, and nongame fish dominate the fish community. Tributaries to the Weiser River, which have not been adversely impacted by agricultural practices or stream alterations support excellent populations of native rainbow trout/redband trout. The redband trout will be managed for racial preservation with sterile hatchery fish stocked in important drainages.

Scattered populations of bull trout occupy individual tributaries to the Little Weiser River, the East Fork Weiser River and Hornet Creek. These remnant populations would benefit from becoming interconnected by improved water quality and stream flows.

B. Objectives and Programs

1. Objective: Obtain stream resource maintenance flows to enhance the native fish populations.

   Program: Quantify and apply for minimum stream flows where unallocated flows are available.

   Program: Work with Soil Conservation Service, Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, and landowners to utilize more efficient irrigation systems.

   Program: Evaluate the potential to enlarge Lost Valley Reservoir to provide summer flows in the Weiser River for eventual delivery to Weiser area irrigators or hydropower interests. Emphasis must include protection and mitigation of impacts to the Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel colony.

2. Objective: Improve methods to control flooding and erosion.

   Program: Work with Soil Conservation Service, Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, and Idaho Department of Water Resources to have environmentally acceptable methods used for stream channel alterations and riparian vegetation restoration.

3. Objective: Preserve disjunct populations of bull trout and work to reconnect them into a metapopulation to enhance recovery.

   Program: Work with land management agencies to preserve and improve habitat. Identify and remedy migration barriers that prevent fish migration. Support efforts to provide improved water quality and summer stream flow throughout the drainage above Little Weiser River.

4. Objective: Preserve redband trout genetic integrity and population abundance.

   Program: Limit hatchery trout to reservoirs and limited stream sections near major access points, such as campgrounds. Use sterile rainbow trout stocks.

   Program: Retain springtime fishing closures in the Adams County portions of the drainage to protect naturally spawning fish from harvest during this period of concentration and vulnerability.

5. Objective: Create local small fishing ponds in cooperation with local city or county governments.

   Program: Utilize federal aide funds for "seed monies" to construct small local fishing ponds in the Weiser drainage.

Drainage: WEISER RIVER

Water	Miles/acre	Fishery			Management Direction
		Type	Species Present	Management	
Weiser River from mouth to Little Weiser River	36/	Mixed	Smallmouth bass Channel catfish Rainbow trout Mountain whitefish	General	Evaluate current fishery and angler satisfaction. Identify limiting factors and seek to reduce their impacts on fish production. Identify and procure fishing access sites.
Mainstem from mouth of Little Weiser River upstream including tributaries not listed below	196/	Mixed	Rainbow trout Redband trout Brook trout Smallmouth bass Brown trout Mountain whitefish Bull trout	Wild trout Conservation	Maintain 0.5 fish/hour catch rates on naturally-produced trout. Redband subspecies will be managed for racial preservation and limiting hatchery rainbow trout stocking. Maintain spawning season closure. Closed to harvest.
Little Weiser River and tributaries	62/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Redband trout Brook trout Mountain whitefish Bull trout	Wild trout Conservation	Maintain 0.5 fish/hour catch rates on naturally-produced trout. Redband subspecies will be managed for racial preservation by limiting hatchery rainbow trout stocking. Maintain spawning season closure. Closed to harvest.
Middle Fork Weiser River and tributaries	28/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout/ Redband trout Brook trout Mountain whitefish Bull trout	Wild trout Conservation	Maintain 0.5 fish/hour catch rates on naturally-produced and hatchery rainbow trout. Continue limited hatchery plantings on Middle Fork near campgrounds only. Redband subspecies will receive priority management. Closed to harvest.
West Fork Weiser River and tributaries	36/	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Redband trout Brook trout Mountain whitefish Bull trout	Wild trout Conservation	Maintain 0.5 fish/hour catch rates on naturally-produced trout. Redband subspecies will be managed for racial preservation by limiting hatchery rainbow trout stocking. Maintain spawning season closure. Closed to harvest.

Mann Creek Reservoir (Spangler Reservoir)	/281	Mixed	Largemouth bass Black crappie Rainbow trout Redband trout	General	Maintain catchable rainbow trout stocking.
Crane Creek Reservoir	/2,200	Mixed	Largemouth bass Bullhead White crappie	General	Evaluate white crappie population structure every other year. Investigate fishery renovation during drought years.
Ben Ross Reservoir	/353	Mixed	Largemouth bass Bluegill Crappie Bullhead Rainbow trout	Quality General	Maintain quality bass regulation. Evaluate the feasibility of constructing habitat structures. Work with landowner to retain access to shoreline.
Lost Valley Reservoir	/633	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brook trout Yellow perch	General	Maintain 0.5 to 1.0 fish/hour catch rates on 10- to 16-inch rainbow trout from annual fingerling and catchable rainbow trout stocking. Expect overpopulation of yellow perch on a 5- to 6-year cycle, and chemically eradicate the reservoir when the perch population retards trout growth or becomes a serious nuisance to anglers.